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BY

SIR OLIVER MOWAT.

An Address delivered before the Young Men's Christian Associations of the Medical Faculty of the University of Toronto and of Trinity Medical College, Sunday, February 13th, 1898, and now published by request.

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CHRISTIANITY AND ITS INFLUENCE.

TUDENTS of medicine have chosen for their life-work a profession than which no other, having to do primarily with things earthly, is more honorable, or more useful, or brings to those who follow it a larger amount of esteem, respect and gratitude. How could it be otherwise? The purpose and efforts of the profession are to save life, and to remove or allay pain and misery. That is their business. All of us well know that a medical practitioner, in the exercise of his profession, often knowingly runs great risks, risks to his health, and risks to his life, in visiting and treating patients suffering from contagious and infectious diseases, as well as in other ways; but he no more thinks of preferring his personal safety to the duty which his profession demands of him, than the soldier shrinks from his dangerous duty when called on to face human foes armed for his destruction.

By the relief which a medical man gives to his

patients, and the attention which they receive from him in the discharge of his duty, he becomes an object of gratitude and affection both to his patients and to others to whom his patients are dear ; and in this way he acquires with both classes influence in matters outside his profession. The fact of his being a man of education above the average of those with whom he has to do is a further occasion of influence with them. His influence from all these causes is both an unsought influence, arising in part from what is known of his character, opinions and opportunities, and also an influence which he may exert by express effort. Whatever the influence is, it is a "talent" to be used for good. Whatever power of this kind you may have, most of you (I hope all of you) would like to employ worthily. That I think I may assume to be the present sentiment of each of you. You would not like to use your influence for harm, nor to throw it away unused for good. You would like that, in some way or other, and in every way practicable, the world may be the better for your having lived in it ; that your country may be the better for your having been its citizen ; and that your family, your mother and your father, your sisters and your brothers, and all others whom you love or like, may be the better for your relation to them. I should be

glad to be able to say something that may help any of you to use in the most beneficial way practicable the influence which you may possess or acquire.

With this object, then, my first remark is, that if in the course of my long and active life I have learned one lesson more distinctly than another, it is that the influence of a man or woman for good, as regards even this world, is immensely promoted by having faith in Christianity. Many of you know that to be so ; and many of you are, I hope, acting on that knowledge, and mean with God's help to act on it to the end. It would be delightful if this were the case with all of you. The average medical students and average medical practitioners in our Province are said to compare favorably with the average of such students and practitioners anywhere ; and as regards both the learning of the profession and skill in its application. This is gratifying to all Canadians. It would be still more gratifying to all the best of them if it could also be truly said that our medical men, young and old, were distinguished above their fellows throughout the world for hearty acceptance of the Christian faith, and for Christian conduct and character.

There may be some present who, while accepting or professing the Christian faith, do not

act upon it; and there may be others who do not give to the religion of the loving Christ even their outward assent. It is to these classes of medical students specially that I purpose speaking, though I shall not have in mind them only.

Some young men, and some who are not young, think it smart to laugh at religion in general, or at some of its doctrines; and this without having studied the subject in (if at all) more than a very partial and superficial manner. I trust that there are no such mockers among you. Such mockery, permit me to say, is rude and foolish conceit on the part of any young people who indulge in it, considering that the subject is of transcendent importance, that the religion of Jesus is and always has been very dear to multitudes of the best people everywhere, and that a great host of men of high intellect and great learning have in all ages believed in it.

People of the present day are encouraged to disbelieve by the authority and example of eminent men (comparatively few in number) who, during the last half-century, have been declared or known unbelievers. The influence, also, of many of the most read novels of the present day is on the same side. These novels are generally read, not for their agnosticism, but for their attractions in other respects, and, while

their infidelity may not hurt readers whose faith is established, it is apt to harm others, especially perhaps young men. So it is with many magazines and newspapers conducted with ability, and valuable in other respects, but edited in an anti-Christian spirit, and in which from time to time there appear anti-Christian articles or observations. In some of these publications, as well as in other publications avowedly anti-Christian, it is affirmed, and many of their constant readers are led to believe, that Christianity is a "fable," and that belief in it is "dying out," if it is not "dead." Some go so far as to assert as true the absurdity that Christianity is a hindrance to civilization and to the good of the world, instead of being (as it is) their great promoter. No errors could be greater than these. While it is true that some eminent men have in this century announced themselves as anti-Christians, some eminent men have done the like in perhaps every age of the Christian era; but there never was a time when a larger number of the educated men of the world were Christians than is the case to-day. In speaking of eminent men who have been or are believers, need I remind you of such eminent believers as Bacon, and Newton and Brewster, and Faraday, and Agassiz, and Dana, and Morse, amongst physicists who have passed away; or as Lord Kelvin, Mr. Mivart,

and Sir William Dawson, amongst physicists who are still living; besides a very host of other learned and able men of the highest distinction in all countries and ages, scientists, philosophers, historians, judges, statesmen, legislators, doctors, lawyers, literary men, and theologians, who have believed in Christianity as a revelation from heaven.

This belief in Christianity by great and good and learned men does not prove Christianity to be true; but, to intelligent inquirers, the belief in it by such men neutralizes and destroys any argument against Christianity derived from the agnosticism of other eminent men, and shows to the intelligent that men must have other reasons for unbelief than the opinions of unbelievers, however eminent.

As for Christianity being dead or dying, this is most certainly not true, and can be shown by most satisfactory evidence not to be true. It is the reverse of the truth. A like assertion as to Christianity being in a dying condition was in past ages often made; but the facts always turned out otherwise. The men who some 1860 years ago got the Founder of Christianity put to death, thought that by that act they had extinguished the religion which he taught. But, instead of his religion being extinguished, its adherents increased immensely from that

day, both in numbers and in devotion ; and so increased far more rapidly than they had done before. So, the early assailants of this religion, after its Founder's death, thought repeatedly that they had destroyed it by their arguments and otherwise. Kings and Emperors thought they could destroy it, if not by arguments, yet by martyrdoms and by persecutions of the fiercest kinds. But all failed. Voltaire, in the eighteenth century, believed and prophesied that "before the beginning of the nineteenth century Christianity will have disappeared from the earth." The beginning of the nineteenth century came, and Christianity had not disappeared. We are now near the end of that century, and Christianity not only still exists, but never before showed greater evidences of both life and permanency. Never before had so large a number of the world's population faith in some form of Christianity as is the case now. A century ago the Christian population of the world (using here the word "Christian" in its broadest sense) was estimated at less than 200 millions ; it is now upwards of 400 millions. There never was a time, either, (as I said on another occasion) in which, among Christians, there were so many true, earnest and self-denying believers as now ; never a time when the churches, old and new, were more active and aggressive ; never a time when

so many Christian organizations of great power were at work for the evangelization of the world; never a time in which so much money was contributed to Christian objects of all kinds.

While in all these respects there has been a great increase in the religious activity, and religious attainments generally, of the old churches, the number of new and powerful organizations which have sprung up with like objects is most remarkable. Some of these are independent of particular churches, and others are in close connection with existing churches. It is only about 150 years since the Methodists came into existence as a separate organization, and they have now become one of the greatest Protestant denominations in Christendom. Sunday-schools for religious training are of still more modern origin; and it is estimated that the number of scholars now receiving instruction in them is nearly twenty-three millions; a most significant fact, seeing that Sunday-schools are amongst the most powerful agencies of the Christian faith. The Religious Tract Society was formed in London less than a century ago, and its issues since are counted in millions, and comprise translations into almost all the languages spoken in the world. The British and Foreign Bible Society has been said to be the greatest agency ever devised for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures,

and it had no existence until the present century. The Young Men's Christian Associations are of still more recent origin than these societies, and are now in active operation in almost every part of the world. The same may be said of the Women's Christian Associations of various kinds, the Societies of Christian Endeavor, the Epworth Leagues, the Salvation Army, and other new Christian enterprises. These are Protestant institutions. I think I see, also, amongst Roman Catholics, increased interest during the same period in those great truths which, happily, Roman Catholics and Protestants hold in common. The progress of Christianity includes both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

So, modern missions have been in operation for but a century, and now the great missionary societies at work are reckoned by the hundred, and their operations extend to all parts of heathendom, and have been attended with much success amongst heathen peoples. Protestant missions have at work an estimated force of nearly ten thousand foreign missionaries, and more than fifty thousand native missionaries. This great army of Christian workers minister to 1,250,000 communicants in mission churches, and have three or four millions (some estimate five millions) of adherents who were

previously heathen. Through the agency of missions, some lands which a century ago and less were heathen lands are now distinctly Christian. These missions have also accomplished much incidentally that is valuable to the human race with reference to this life, as well as accomplishing much in regard to the infinitely more important matter of the life to come. They have accomplished great things in all the departments of knowledge, learning and science; great things in advancing civilization and all that civilization implies; and great things in promoting morality, a matter more important than all others relating to this life. On this subject I find the following cited from the testimony of Lord Lawrence, who was Viceroy and Governor-General of India from 1864 to 1869, and had thirty years' previous experience there: "I believe, notwithstanding all that the English people have done to benefit India, the missionaries have done more than all other agencies combined." Also the following from Sir Bartle Frere, formerly Governor of Bombay, and afterwards of the Cape of Good Hope: "I assure you that, whatever you have been told to the contrary, the teachings of Christianity amongst the one hundred and sixty millions of civilized, industrious Hindus and Mohammedans in India, have effected changes, moral, social and political, which for

extent and rapidity of effect are far more extraordinary than anything else you or your fathers have witnessed in modern Europe." The same thing may be said, and in at least some cases with equal force, as to all other countries in which Christian missionaries have been at work. In a word, the facts place it beyond well-founded doubt that "Christian missionaries are the most effective means ever brought to bear upon the social, civil, commercial, moral and spiritual interests of mankind." The truth of Christianity and faith in it have produced these results.

Some suppose that Christianity has fallen back in the United States, and thence infer that it has fallen back everywhere. But it has not fallen back in the United States, any more than elsewhere. In saying this I put out of account the un-Christian hate towards the Motherland manifested by many among our neighbors ; and I put out of account the efforts which have been made to keep up or intensify that hate. I know of no sufficient reason for believing that the hate is shared by the religious people of the nation ; and it is impossible to believe that the better part of the population, whether religious or not, desire to shed the blood and wreck the property of their kinsmen of another nationality, with whom for seventy years and more there have been peace and friendly relations. As to faith in Christianity in

that country, official census returns and other well-authenticated data show that, notwithstanding all the irreligion which prevails there as it does elsewhere, Christianity is more full of life in the United States now than it ever was before; that its vitality has increased in every decade of the century; and has so increased not only absolutely, but also relatively to the population. This appears from, for example, what has been ascertained of the comparative number of churches at different periods, the comparative accommodation afforded, the comparative number of church members, evangelical ministers, Sunday-school teachers and Sunday-school pupils, the comparative value of church property, and the comparative amounts contributed annually for missions and other religious objects.

Thus, so far from there having been a dying out of Christianity in the United States or elsewhere, ascertained facts show greatly increased life and vigor there and throughout the world, and make plain that, rampant as agnosticism or unbelief may seem in some respects to be, if any of you have been inclined on that account, or any other, to regard Christianity as a dying belief or a dying institution, you are deceiving yourselves. The truth is the very reverse.

Undoubtedly, though Christianity has been steadily advancing, yet there is at the same

time, unhappily, much irreligion in all nominally Christian lands; but this is not a new thing; there has always been irreligion; and so, as Christians generally believe, there will continue to be until Christ comes in person to reign on the earth. This irreligion is, in part, in the form of intellectual unbelief; but it is much more in the form of crime, vice, injustice, cruelty, falsehood and selfishness of every kind—all of which Christianity condemns, and has declared war against. A religion which is so exacting in its demands as Christianity is, and was so unpromising at its beginning, and yet has spread as Christianity has done, and has so strong a hold on mankind at this day, is certainly not dead, is not dying, is not a failure.

It is undoubtedly an exacting religion, as well as a true and the only true religion; but its exactions are such as promote the present as well as future well-being of the race; for, what is it that Christianity requires of us? It requires personal purity and godliness. As regards conduct towards others, it requires that in every act of life each of us enquire: What does honesty require? What do justice and fair-dealing require of us? What does humanity require of us? What does the influence of our example require of us? As regards example, you young men may by your example help to

make or keep your companions and others sober men, well-behaved in all the relations of life, and for all their lives; or, on the other hand, you may help to make them drunkards, and in other respects worse than useless to themselves and to their families and to society. My brothers, which will you do? Will you help them to be good and useful? or will you help them to be bad, and worse than useless? Will you be on Christ's side? or will you be on His enemy's?

What is revealed or believed of rewards and punishments in another world has a powerful effect on multitudes who do not appreciate other Christian truths, and exerts some influence on those also who do appreciate those other truths. As to the rewards, Professor Huxley, agnostic as (unhappily) he is, writing on the subject of "Decline in Religious Belief," has this just observation: "The lover of moral beauty, struggling through a world of sorrow and sin, is surely as much the stronger for believing that sooner or later a vision of perfect peace and goodness will burst upon him, as a toiler up a mountain is the stronger for the belief that beyond the crag and snow lie rest and home." So, belief in future punishment frightens many, and restrains them from wrong-doing more than anything

else does. Everlasting punishment certainly is a fate which no present advantages or pleasures can compensate for, even though these should last a lifetime; and no earthly advantage or pleasure lasts a lifetime. So, immortality in happiness is infinitely more than an adequate reward for any amount of work and sacrifice and suffering in our earthly lives, however long these may last. No consideration outside of religion can present such powerful reasons for right living as are afforded by the credited declarations of Scripture regarding rewards and punishments.

But Christianity presents far more powerful motives than rewards and punishments. It does so in teaching that God is love, and is to those who love Him the most loveable of all objects of love. According to Christian doctrine, God is nearer to us than father or mother, than wife or child, than brother or sister; we owe to Him all things; He is our Creator, our Redeemer, our Preserver, our Bountiful Benefactor; He so loved the world—so loved us—as to send into the world His only begotten and eternal Son to be a propitiation for our sins. It was from love to us that Christ came into the world, and suffered, and died; and, as a result, whoever now believes in him, and earnestly and truly accepts him, shall have an everlasting life of unspeakable joy and happiness and purity. This loving God is to be loved

with all the heart and soul and mind and strength; this, our Saviour declared, is the first and greatest commandment; and the second, he said, is like unto it—thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments, he declared, hang all the law and the prophets; and this (we are told) is the love of God, namely, that we keep His commandments. This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God do love his neighbor also; we are to love our neighbor as Christ loved all men, and gave himself a sacrifice for them. In discharging this duty we are to bear one another's burdens, and therein fulfil the law of Christ. We are to render glad and loving service in a special sense to the friendless, the sick, the suffering, and the needy, whatever their country or their creed. The Samaritan is to help and do good to the Jew, and the Jew is to help and do good to the Samaritan; Britons to Americans; Americans to Britons. In a word, Christianity enjoins on all to cultivate supreme love to the God and Father of all, and to live towards all men lives of truth, justice, kindness, and active benevolence. That is what God loves, and requires of us.

Without this love on our part, and this goodness of character and conduct towards our fellowmen, it is the doctrine of Christianity that the soundness of our faith is nothing—is but as

sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal ; and is so even though that faith were strong enough as (in the language of the great apostle of the Gentiles) to " remove mountains."

It is thus to love, that supreme importance is attached by Christianity. The Christian religion is a religion of love ; and of all that love involves. Love is the sweetest of all words in human language. Love is the most powerful motive power with mankind of every class. All history and all experience show this. Love makes practicable, and even easy and pleasant, what would otherwise be difficult, or impossible, or intolerably disagreeable. So it has been amongst all peoples and in all ages.

How can it be otherwise than promotive of good to really and from the heart believe that our Creator, the Creator of all things, the all-seeing God of the universe, is a God of Love ? and is on the side of everything good ? desires us to be loving to one another, and to be good, honest, truthful, pure ? knows and notices when we are so, and when we are not so ? loves in a special way those who are good and kind and true ? and will endow these with great blessings in the eternal life to come ? How can belief in such truths as these be otherwise than good in its influence on a man who believes ? How can it be otherwise than good for mankind as a whole ?

The influence of Christianity on the character of men is under God owing, not to its moral teachings merely, but, in connection with these moral teachings, is owing to the facts and doctrines of Christianity. These give incalculable force to the moral teachings. As the result of Christian teachings, the actual historical fact is, that loving faith in our Heavenly Father and His Eternal Son has, in the case of millions of Christian men and Christian women in the last nineteen centuries, been a great and mighty power for good; and it is a great and mighty power for good still; and so, doubtless, will be for ever.

The faith of all believers in Christianity is not equally strong, nor is the obedience of all equally full. It is a doctrine of the Church to which I belong that, "no mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word and deed." I believe that no important Christian denomination teaches the absolute and uninterrupted sinlessness of Christians, not of even the best of them. On the contrary, all Christian churches concur in holding that any Christian may be "overtaken in a fault," as St. Peter was when he denied his Master, and on other occasions. The like was the case with some Old Testament saints and worthies. But when a Christian has sinned he

remembers his sin with shame and humiliation ; and his comfort is, that before God sin repented of is sin forgiven ; that if we confess our sins, we are assured our Heavenly Father is "faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness ;" that "if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous ;" and that he is the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. In dealing with such cases, St. Paul gave this direction : "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

While absolute perfection of conduct or character may not be attained or attainable by any person in this life, experience has shown that none can really believe the doctrines which Christ taught, and in any degree really love Him, the God-man, the Divine Messenger of Love, without being in some measure influenced by their faith in Him, and manifesting in their lives and character something of the Christian spirit. Love to God and to Christ the Son, begets likeness to the character which God approves and Christ exemplified ; and, though a Christian may not be perfect, his efforts are in the direction of perfection. It is a matter of

certain fact that millions have loved, and millions are loving, the Father and Son sufficiently to strive with all their hearts to conform themselves (by God's grace) to all Christ's teachings; and that multitudes in all ages have demonstrated the power of Christianity over the heart and conduct by enduring for its sake the greatest possible hardships, sacrifices and sufferings. It is interesting to note that every form of Christianity has had its martyrs for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to Christianity being a hindrance to the well-being of the race, as some allow themselves to think or say, the proposition sounds supremely absurd to most men of fair minds, whether they are Christians or not. Thomas Carlyle did not believe in Christianity as a revealed and supernatural religion; but he said of it: "The Christian religion must ever be regarded as the crowning glory, or, rather, the life and soul, of our whole modern culture." So Matthew Arnold, though very far from being an orthodox Christian, had such words as these to say of the Christian religion and its influence: "Men are not mistaken in thinking that Christianity has done them good, [are not mistaken] in loving it, in wishing to listen to those who will talk to them about what they love, and (they) will talk of it with admiration and gratitude. . . . Chris-

tianity is truly . . . the greatest and happiest stroke ever yet made for human perfection. Men do not err, they are on firm ground of experience, when they say that they have practically found Christianity to be something incomparably beneficent."

Then again, Mr. Lecky, the rationalist historian, recently elected to the British House of Commons as member for the University of Dublin, has these observations: "Christianity, the life of morality, the basis of civilization, has regenerated the world." "It (the Christian religion) softens the character, purifies and directs the imagination, blends insensibly with habitual modes of thought, and, without revolutionizing, gives a tone and bias to all forms of action." "As a matter of fact, Christianity has done more to quicken the affections of mankind, to create a pure and merciful idea, than any other influence that has ever acted upon the world." "The great characteristic of Christianity is that it has been the main source of the moral development of Europe, and that it has discharged this office, not so much by the inculcation of a system of ethics, however pure, as by the assimilating and attractive influence of a perfect ideal. The moral progress of mankind can never cease to be distinctively and intensely Christian as long as it consists of a gradual approximation

to the character of the Christian Founder. There is, indeed, nothing more wonderful in the history of the human race than the way in which that ideal has traversed the lapse of ages, acquiring new strength and beauty with each advance of civilization, and infusing its beneficent influence into every sphere of thought and action."

No; the Christianity of the Bible is no hindrance to humanity or human progress; it is the intensely opposite of a hindrance; it is a mighty power, the mightiest of all powers, for purifying and humanizing and civilizing, as well as for preparing for the blessedness of an immortal life in heaven.

In view of these considerations, if Christianity were not true, a lover of his race might well regret with all his heart that it is not true; but a candid, intelligent examination of its evidences satisfies most enquirers that Christianity is true. If any of you think at present that these evidences do not demonstrate its truth, let it be remembered that many learned men and good men have thought, and still think, the demonstration ample. But what if the evidences amount to a greater or less degree of probability only? Do not throw away your faith on that account. There is no young man or woman, no man or woman young or old, who does not believe, and

rightly believe, a hundred things on grounds of probability, which, to say the least, are inferior to those probabilities that favor Christianity. Why is any young man unwilling to believe in Christianity on like probable evidence? Why does he allow himself to treat as nothing the testimony which there is in its favor, whether in his opinion such evidence amounts to demonstration or not? Why should he stumble at some supposed difficulty, in the evidence or otherwise, for which he cannot find what may seem to him a satisfactory solution? There are difficulties in everything. There are difficulties and mysteries in every branch of science; in every department of nature; in the functions of our bodies; in the workings of our minds. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration, there are things which are true and yet incomprehensible. What though there are difficulties and mysteries in Christianity also? If it presents difficulties and mysteries, consider also what the evidences are in its favor. Let these be studied and weighed. Its proofs are many and various. Among Christians who have examined them, some are more impressed with one line of evidence and some with another. In an address which I delivered elsewhere some time ago, and which was afterwards published, I gave a summary of the proofs which were

then most satisfactory to my own mind. Others may prefer some of the other proofs which published treatises supply. It is only necessary that every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind.

As the conclusion of the whole matter, my sisters and brothers, I exhort you, being as a layman one of yourselves, that you hold fast the Christian faith as being a faith necessary and good for both worlds; for this world, as we know; and for the next world, as for strong reasons, and in common with a multitude of the world's greatest thinkers and best men and women, we heartily believe. Hold fast to the Christian faith, as good for yourselves, good for those whom you love, and good for those whom from time to time you may influence. Above all, hold fast to your Christian faith from gratitude and love to the loving Father and God of all, and to His loving Son, who from love laid down his life for us.

My sisters and brothers, think on these things; and may the Spirit of the Eternal Father have His abode in your minds and hearts forever.